Stories of Old Home Songs

By CARL SCHURZ LOWDEN

Woodman, Spare That Tree!

WHEN grey hairs come the average person turns back to the time of youth and lives again those care-free days of irresponsible childhood. Age likes to review and experience afresh, with the aid of the mental storehouse, the blissful hours when feet were bare and play was unrestrained.

Often had George Pope Morris loitered under an elm on his father's farm, there obtained protection from the scorching sun, and there played many delightful games. It was entirely natural that in 1836 when the old tree was threatened with destruction he should intervene to save it.

The incident inspired Morris to write the famous poem which became popular as a song when Henry Russell set the words to music. Probably for ease in enunciation, Morris called the tree an oak instead of the elm which it really was.

The poem was not deliberately penned by the New York journalist. Circumstances of a shocking kind jolted his equanimity and moved him to action. He saw as he had never seen before how large a part the tree played in the drama of his life. The incident came home to him with an irresistible force that would not be denied; in the crucible of his aroused emotions the dross fell away and left the pure gold for the making of "Woodman, Spare That Tree."

One day Morris and Russell were out riding. When they came to a little, romantic woodland near Bloomingdale, New York, Morris suggested that they turn off the main road. Russell consented but asked why.

"Merely to look once more at an old tree near a cottage that was once my father's," came the explanation. "I spent many happy days in that old cottage, but my father died and then my mother sold the place."

The two men rode on in silence for a while. The face of the narrator paled and a moisture came to his eyes.

"I don't know how it is," he resumed, "but I never ride out that I do not turn down this lane to look at the old tree. I have a thousand recollections about it, and I always greet it as an old friend. In the bygone summertime it was a friend indeed. Under its branches I have often listened to the good counsel of my parents and had glorious gambols with my sisters."

The horses took the men nearer and nearer. Morris seemed to be wrapped in his thoughts, for he did not look up as he continued:

"Its leaves are all off now, so you won't see it to advantage, for it is a fine old fellow in summer. There it is!"

At that moment Morris looked toward the tree. He was surprised at what he saw, for an old man was sharpening an axe under its branches.

"What are you going to do?" Morris asked.

"What is that to you?"

"You are not going to cut that tree down?"

The man said that was his intention. He tested the edge of his axe by drawing his thumb along it. Morris then asked for the reason.

"What for!" the woodman replied. "Well, I'll tell you what for. This tree makes my dwelling unhealthy. It stands too near the house and prevents the moisture from leaving it and makes my family have the fever and the ague."

"Have you any other reason?" Morris pursued.

"Yes, I am getting old. The woods are a great way off, and this tree is of value to me to burn."

Both Morris and Russell questioned the old man somewhat searchingly. They discovered that the story about the fever and the ague was fiction and that he was wholly concerned with the problem of getting firewood. The nearness of the tree made it desirable for that use.

"What is it worth?" asked Morris.

"Why," the fellow declared, "I reckon when it is down it will be worth about ten dollars."

"Suppose I should give you that sum, would you let it stand unharmed?"

"Yes."

"You are sure of that?" the visitor insisted.

"I am."

"Then," answered the journalist, "give me a bond to that effect."

Thus the old tree was saved. Morris himself drew up the bond. Henry Russell and the daughter of the woodman were the witnesses.

"The money was paid," the author of the lyric said in a letter to a friend, "and we left the place with an assurance from the young girl, smiling and beautiful, that the tree should stand as long as she lived.

"We returned to the road and pursued our ride. The circumstances made a strong impression on my mind, and furnished me with materials for the song I sent you."

The song became popular in England and there received a compliment that greatly delighted the author. A member of the House of Commons made a long speech in favor of protection. He compared the constitution to the tree and pictured Sir Robert Peel as the woodman about to cut it down.

Woodman, Spare That Tree!

Woodman, spare that tree!
Touch not a single bough!
In youth it sheltered me,
And I'll protect it now.
'Twas my forefather's hand
That placed it near his cot;
There, woodman, let it stand—
Thy axe shall harm it not!

That old familiar tree,
Whose glory and renown
Are spread o'er land and sea—
And wouldst thou hew it down?
Woodman, forbear thy stroke!
Cut not its earth-bound ties;
Oh, spare that aged oak,
Now towering to the skies!

When but an idle boy,
I sought its graceful shade;
In all their gushing joy
Here, too, my sisters played.
My mother kissed me here;
My father pressed my hand—
Forgive this foolish tear,
But let that old oak stand!

My heart-strings round thee cling,
Close as thy bark, old friend!
Here shall the wild-bird sing,
And still thy branches bend.
Old tree! the storm still brave!
And, woodman, leave the spot;
While I've a hand to save,
Thy axe shall harm it not!

Easter Lilies

ALTHOUGH not their birthplace, Bermuda is generally regarded as the home of the Easter lily, the so-called Bermuda lily having been brought from the Orient between two hundred and three hundred years ago by some pirate captains who made their homes on the islands. Through generations of care and cultivation, it has been passed on from father to son until the Bermuda lily has become one of the household gods of the planters, in fact, with the onion, the chief crop.

The lilies grow in small, detached fields, in pleasant hollows, and hills. But, although these fields are small, they are numerous. A bird's-eye view of the islands presents a mass of tiny garden plots. The climate is so ideal for the lilies that they flourish in wild luxuriance, and it takes only slight skill to make the ground blossom.

The temperature ranges from 60 to 70 degrees in winter, and even in summer the thermometer barely registers above 80 degrees; frosts and extreme heat are alike unknown. Night has a heavy dew, and in the day refreshing showers often pass over the island, being absorbed by the soil and porous coral rock. In the sheltered parts, flowers grow all the year, and it is not unusual for the plants to bear three crops of lilies in a single year.

The raising of Easter lilies has been one of the leading industries of Bermuda since 1878, although it was not until the early 90's that the Bermuda lily became known in the United States. As Bermuda is only two days sail from the east coast of the United States, it is quite easy to transplant the lilies just before they are ready to bloom and ship them by the thousands for sale by the retail florists. Each plant is carefully potted, and the buds wrapped so that they will not be subject to touch, or to the light. This insures their blooming at the right time.

There have been several attempts to raise Easter lilies in the United States, and some florists have been successful. As a whole, however, the plants are not as hardy nor as perfect as those grown out-of-doors in Bermuda.

FROM OUR READERS

Is Military Training Necessary Or Beneficial?

To THE EDITOR: In the matter of military training for all young men in the United States between the ages of 18 and 21, there is one feature involved that is not receiving sufficient public attention.

There can be no question that a thorough military training fits a young man to respect and obey "law and order" of the established kind prevailing in his time; but some other results are not so clear.

Obedience is the first element taught in our public schools. A child begins with six hours per day, in a fixed place and seat, forbidden to communicate with another even by a whisper, and to obey several other rules without protest or suggestion of change or relief and to give strict attention to the things or instructions put before him, and this under penalty from the authority established over him.

A child with his mental powers so fixed, and so made to grow for a period of years, will always thereafter conform to the "law and order" of his time, and is practically sure never to take a leading part in any revolutionary movement. This fixed condition of mind generally bars a child from all but the accustomed routine of life.

From young minds so fixed no great men ever develop, and children that are not broken to this condition because they are slow to learn and extremely wilful in their disobedience often make a mark in life after passing the years of school discipline.

There can be no question that a military training has features of great importance in carrying on war, but in all other pursuits in life it is of questionable importance.

The soldier is taught to stand up straight and in a healthful position and look pert and attractive, and this feature is a lifelong blessing to him, but this fact acts as camouflage for much behind it that should be brought into the limelight before this republic takes a plunge into militarism.

If you ask any soldier returned from the Great War the following questions, you are practically sure to receive the following answers:

Q. If another war starts will you enlist?

A. If Uncle Sam wants me again he will have to come after me.

Q. You don't present any complaints of ill usage; how is this?

A. I want to forget it.

The above answers are worthy of more than a passing notice, for they are covering up something of no small concern.

One fact is fixed in a soldier's mind and fixed there to stay, and that is, "No brave, true soldier complains." This is fixed by design and by a method scientifically established by military schooling.

The little boy at school does not see that law and order is being stamped into his very soul and the young soldier does not see much deeper into the designs of military science.

When a young soldier is held at attention 30 minutes and then relieved by permission to make some physical motions, the tremendous sense of relief practically wipes from his mind all but the dread of the first process. This law of compensation, like the child's recess, is too long to discuss here. It is immensely important in military science.

A soldier volunteers to defend his country, intending to stake all he has on earth, and when he finds that he is only a little and dispensable cog in an immense machine, with only the right to "Obey Orders" and not to think, much less to make a suggestion, he begins to load up with what is expressed in his short reply, "I want to forget it."

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